## **Horseshoe Bend**

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

National Military Park Alabama





Horseshoe Bend of the Tallapoosa ©EASTERN NATION

"This bend which resembles in its curvature that of a horse-shoe, includes, I conjecture, eighty or a hundred acres. The River immediately around it, is deep, & somewhat upwards of a hundred yards wide. As a situation for defense it was selected with judgment, & improved with great industry and art."

With those words, Andrew Jackson described the place where, on March 27, 1814, 3,300 Tennessee militia, U.S. Regulars, and allied warriors under his command defeated 1,000 Red Sticks led by Chief Menawa. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended the Creek Indian War, and the peace treaty added 23 million acres of Creek land to the southeastern United States—three-fifths of Alabama and one-fifth of Georgia. For Andrew Jackson, victory at Horseshoe Bend was the first step on the road to national fame and the White House. Nine months later, on January 8, 1815, he defeated the British in the Battle of New Orleans, the last major battle of the War of 1812.



## The Creek Nation

Tribal beliefs place the Creeks' origin in the American Southwest. They migrated eastward, eventually occupying much of today's Alabama and Georgia. Their name derives from "Ochese Creek Indians," after the branch of the Ocmulgee River the Creeks lived along when the British first encountered them.

By displacing or incorporating other tribes, they built a loose but broad confederacy divided geographically by the Chattahoochee River into Upper Towns and Lower Towns.

For over 100 years Spain, France, and Britain vied for Creek favor, chiefly using trade for negotiation. As Creek dependence on European luxuries grew, the impact on their way of life was tremendous.

After the American Revolution, the tribe opened relations with the United States and in 1790 signed the Treaty of New York, which defined Creek land boundaries and guaranteed American friendship. For nearly 20 years, many Creeks followed U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins's program



Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. agent to southeastern Indians, 1796–1816. Right: Tecumseh, Shawnee chief and prominent Indian Nationalist.

settlers in Georgia.

for improving their agriculture and living standards, a program that was designed to foster peaceful relations between the Creeks and the United States. Because they lived closer to

the Lower Creeks fell under the influence of Hawkins more than Alabama's Upper Creeks did.

The growing division between the Lower

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over Hawkins's "civilization" program intensified as the Lower Sticks

Creeks were drawn

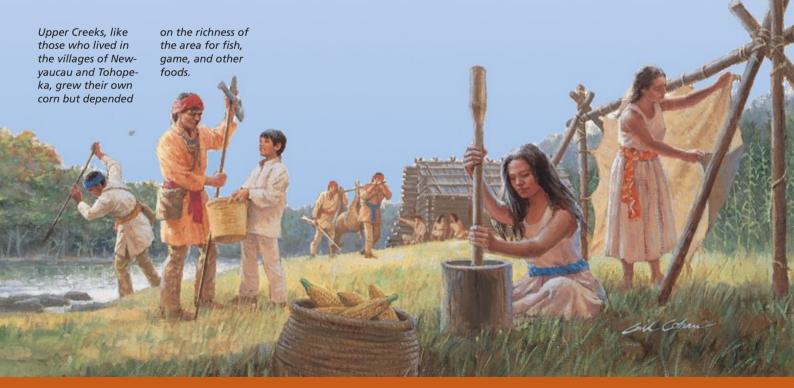
into closer contact

with their Georgia

neighbors.

Fueling the situation were squatters on Creek lands, tribal punishments for Creek attacks on settlers, and Indian nationalism, as set forth by Shawnee Chief Tecumseh.

Most Lower Creeks ignored Tecumseh's eloquent pleas to rise up and to drive the "white man" from Indian lands, but many Upper Creeks, eventually called Red Sticks because they painted their war clubs red—listened attentively and agreed.



## The Creek War, 1813–14

The split between the Creeks widened in February 1813 when an Upper Creek war party murdered seven frontier families after being misinformed that war had broken out between the Creeks and the United States. Pressed by the federal government, a Creek tribal council tried and executed those responsible for the killings. In retaliation, Red Sticks leaders tried to eliminate everyone connected with the executions and all evidence of Hawkins's hated civilization program.

In July 1813 conflict worsened when Mississippi Territory militia ambushed Red Sticks, who were returning from Pensacola with ammunition, at Burnt Corn Creek in Alabama. Retaliating in August the Red Sticks attacked and killed 250 settlers at Fort Mims, 40 miles north of Mobile. U.S. response was immediate. The governors of Mississippi Territory, Georgia, and Tennessee mobilized militias and launched a full-scale campaign to crush the Red Stick towns.

Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson of the Tennessee Militia organized his force and struck southward into the heart of Red



Jackson's difficulty in fighting the Red Sticks was not so much their numbers as that their towns were so inaccessible. The total number of Red Sticks at war

with the United

States was less than

4,000, and not more than 1,000 warriors fought in any single battle. As in other wars, fighting was not the main problem. Jackson's challenges were keeping, moving, and feeding his soldiers.

Sticks country between the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers. Early victories in November at the Upper Creek towns of Tallushatchee and Talladega raised hopes for the war's speedy end, but supply delays, enlistment expirations, threat of starvation, and mutiny slowed Jackson's advance from Fort Strother on the upper Coosa. He began his second campaign in January 1814. After two bloody encounters—at Emuckfau and Enitachopco creeks—he withdrew to Fort Strother.

Despite Jackson's retreat, the outlook for the Red Sticks was grim. During the preceding autumn and winter, warriors and their families built the village of Tohopeka inside the horseshoe bend of the Tallapoosa. The Creeks called the bend Cholocco Litabixee, "horse's flat foot." There they hoped for protection by the encircling river, their Prophet's magic, and a log barricade across the neck of the peninsula and for direction by Chief Menawa, also called the Great Warrior. With their numbers and their weapons reduced by previous defeats, the Red Sticks subsisted on wild game and waited.